DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 589 EA 024 02[illegible]

AUTHOR Lyons, James E.
TITLE Competencies of Beginning Principals--Are They Prepared for The Role?
PUB DATE May 92
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Effectiveness; Administrator Guides; *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; Elementary Secondary Education; *Orientation; *Principals

ABSTRACT

Issues in the preparation of new principals for their role as school administrators are presented in this paper. A review of literature identifies obstacles to beginning principals' effectiveness, some of which include lack of role clarification, limited technical expertise, isolation, and inadequate time management. Suggestions for a smooth transition into the principalship include developing university preparation programs that incorporate training in management, leadership, and knowledge of schooling; providing district-supported principal orientation programs; offering regular and formative feedback; and requiring a professional growth plan. (7 references) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED346589

TITLE

COMPETENCIES OF BEGINNING PRINCIPALS - ARE THEY PREPARED FOR THE ROLE?

AUTHOR

JAMES E. LYONS, Ph. D.

CHAIRMAN, EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

332 KENNEDY BUILDING

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA at CHARLOTTE

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA 28223

(PHONE) (704) 547-4717

ED 024 024

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Lyons

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

James E. Lyons joined the Educational Administration faculty at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in 1979 and has served as chairman of the Educational Administration Department for six years. He has served as a secondary teacher, assistant principal, principal, and school management consultant with the Ohio Department of Education. He holds the Master of Arts degree from East Carolina University and the Doctor of Philosophy degree from The Ohio State University. Lyons' areas of specialization are: The Principalship, Organizational Development/Staff Development, Educational Leadership, and School Personnel Administration. Previous publications generally reflecting these areas of specialization have been published in the NASSP Bulletin, Educational Leadership, The Clearinghouse, National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision, Contemporary Education, The American School Board Journal, SAANYS Journal, and Journal of School Research and Information.

COMPETENCIES OF BEGINNING PRINCIPALS - ARE THEY PREPARED FOR THE ROLE?

Upon being appointed to the principalship, the successful applicant is usually delighted and justifiably proud to have been selected to this important position. Most frequently, he or she has dutifully and faithfully carried out the duties of an assistant or vice principal. Consequently, when appointed to the principalship, the novice principal can hardly wait to assume responsibility for the school to which he or she has been assigned.

Little do they realize that the orientation experience for principals leaves much to be desired in far too many school districts. We have long recognized the need to provide formal and informal experiences for new classroom teachers. Most school districts and schools have formal orientation programs in place for new teachers. Many states now mandate that new teachers be provided mentors for one or more years in order to facilitate their adjustment and success in the profession and their teaching assignment. A review of current practice indicates that <u>far less</u> is being done in school districts to aid new appointees to the principalship.

Usually, the newly appointed principal is given a school, a set of keys, and wished good luck. He or she is far too frequently given an inhibited opportunity to swim or sink. The novice principal seldom understands the full scope of the issues, expectations, and scope of responsibilities that accompany the position.

Arthur Blumberg and William Greenfield (1980), in their book, The Effective Principal, describes the situation as follows:

Whatever the reasons for wanting to become a school principal, most aspirants to the role have a vague understanding of how much it entails. The loneliness, the conflicts, the dullness of the routine, the "busy work," and the anguish that accompany having to solve complex educational and organizational problems with extremely limited resources are usually not part of teachers' conceptions of the principalship.

While Blumberg and Greenfield do accurately describe many aspects of the principalship, these problems are not unsurmountable and can be successfully handled through effective management and leadership.

It is difficult to generalize about all of the problems that beginning principals may encounter because they vary with the administrator's background, training, personality, work habits, and school situation. Unfortunately, there is a very limited amount of empirical research that addresses the problems encountered by new principals. The research that does exist shows that there is a major difference between the needs of teachers and principals. Researchers have traditionally not spent much time looking at the issue of how people learn to become principals; instead, the focus has typically been directed at what practicing principal do--or the focus is on what they are suppose to do.

One thing that the available research does make clear is that any type of assistance and support that can be provided is desperately needed and would be highly welcomed by new principals.

In a 1986 study, John Daresh (1987), who was then at Ohio State University, found that beginning principals reported having the following problems: (1) Problems with Role Clarification, (2) Difficulty with Socialization to the Position of Principal, the School District, and the Individual School Building, and (3) Limitations on Their Technical Expertise. Let's examine these. Problems with Role Clarification and Socialization relates to understanding their change in status, who they are and how they are suppose to make use of authority. The new principal is worried about how students, parents, and particularly teachers will react to them. They want to be accepted, and perhaps even liked, by the various groups with whom they will be working. They also want to be respected; they wonder can they be accepted, liked, and respected. They wonder if they can be liked and also respected. They have to adjust to being viewed as an authority figure; they have to become comfortable with exercising legitimate authority.

If they think that they can be liked by all individuals and groups with whom they work and that all of their decisions will be readily approved and support, certainly they will be disappointed. Inherent in the role clarification problem is the dilemma of role ambiguity. The problem is: do you serve those to whom you are responsible or those <u>for</u> whom you are responsible? Bruce McPherson

et al. (1986) note that this is one of the major dilemmas of the principalship.

Because of this dilemma, principals frequently must broker between the central administration and school staff, parent, and student requests and errands. Usually, after considerable frustration, most principals realize that this is not a problem that can be solved but, rather, it is a condition with which they must live.

Astute new principals quickly learn that they do not have all of the technical expertise to handle the wide variety of responsibilities and challenges they encounter. Learning the many mundane, yet important, school system-specific procedures takes up a lot of the new principal's time and energy. He or she must learn how to read and comprehend the various reports and computer printouts from the school district's central administration, how to handle the various legal issues that arise, how to adjust the lunch schedule, and how to operate the bells, clocks, and interactive learning systems available in the schools. At the same time, he or she is trying to learn where the school attendance boundaries begin and end and who the cast of characters are at the district administrative office. Because each school district has certain peculiar, established procedures to be followed, the new principal expends much time trying to learn the ropes to know and the ropes to jump. Moreover, the "real way" to get things done in a school district is frequently through informal channels based on personal

relationships. Power and authority does not always follow the organization chart.

In a similar study by Dan Duke (1988) of the University of Virginia, most of the same themes in the Daresh study were found. However, he also found that his subjects had problems understanding their leadership responsibilities. Even if one understands the theory and practice of leadership, he or she must learn something about the individuals and groups to be led in a particular setting.

Consequently, the new principal must seek to know the staff individually and collectively. To provide effective leadership, their concerns, aspirations, motivations, perceptions, and frustrations must be determined. Those staff members who require stroking must be identified and stroked as often as needed. In view of what we now know about sexual harassment, this stroking should be done appropriately. This obviously is a time consuming process.

Other researchers have identified isolation and lack of feedback as two other major problems encountered by new principals. The isolation that exists in the principalship frequently comes as a surprise and shock to new principals. They find that there is no one within the school with whom problems, issues, and challenges may be freely shared and discussed. Isolated and without close supervision and guidance, the new principal is afraid of making major mistakes that may have dire consequences weeks or even months later. Accordingly, he or she learns to live with loneliness and to communicate with him or herself--hopefully silently.

New principals frequently must work months, perhaps even the first year without formative feedback or evaluations from superiors. Often the only contact that they have with superiors is when the supervisors relay complaints that have been registered by parents or staff members about school problems and issues unknown to the principal. Daresh notes that they never really know if they are doing what is considered to be a good job. Not only do they not get much feedback from superiors, neither subordinates or peers are likely to provide the new principal with feedback. This lack of feedback sometimes causes novice principals to become tentative, insecure, indecisive, and anxious. Systematic and timely feedback, encouragement, and guidance could add substantially to the new principals confidence, knowledge, and general school management and leadership.

Time management is another problem that plaques new principals. They frequently have the feeling that there is never enough time to do everything that needs to be done. However, anyone familiar with the principal's role knows that this problem also frustrates experienced principals. They learn, through experience, how to roll with the time crunch punches so to speak.

New Principals often find themselves rushing from one issue to another one. What are the causes for their time management problems? There are generally four factors that contribute. (1) Inexperience, (2) The absence of a system for organizing time, (3) The administrative job itself, which by its very

nature is demanding and time consuming, and (4) Failure to delegate responsibility (Gorton and Schneider, 1991. p. 602).

Upon careful examination of these factors we find the following to be true. Due to inexperience, new administrators usually take longer to perform most administrative tasks, as they are often performing many of these for the first time.

Accordingly, it times them longer to accomplish them until, with practice and experience, short cuts can be identified, errors are eliminated, and routines are established. Thus, time in the position is the only remedy for inexperience.

Becoming accustomed to the very nature of the job is also very time consuming for new principals. Even if they have served as assistant principals, most new principals are surprised at the numerous responsibilities of the role and must adjust to the notion that the buck now stops with them. Shocked by the fast pace of life in many schools and the many problems that erupt, many new principals resort to what Morris and Crowson et al. (1984) in their book, Principals in Action, characterize as "problem anticipation." This simply means that the new principal begins to follow a "search routine" wherein they move around the school for much of the day trying to head off or identify potential problems before they erupt. They are literally all over the place--in the corridors, cafeteria, library, playground, and gymnasium--trying to determine what is going on. Referred to by some as the "activity trap," the principal develops an insatiable appetite to monitor the

activities of the school. In short, the principal goes out looking for trouble--and he or she usually finds it. Seldom is any issue or problem too small for the principal to become personally involved. There is a strong desire to place a finger on every problem and potential problem. Once principals fall into the "activity trap," there is little to show for their efforts at the end of the work day and work week, even though they have expended enormous time and energy on the job. Sadly speaking, some principals now consider it a good day if they have simply kept the peace.

Failure to delegate is another major factor contributing to the time management problem. Why are many new principals reluctant to delegate?

1. They have a strong need to be involved in every aspect of administration and cannot bear to delegate any of their responsibility to others.

2. They are concerned that others may begin to wonder if they are really capable of handling the job if they delegate some of the responsibility to other people.

3. They are not confident that others will do good jobs if they delegate certain responsibilities; or at the least, administrators doubt whether others could do as good a job as they would in carrying out a task.

4. They have a strong need to be recognized as the leader in the organization and are concerned with the possibility that delegation of some of the responsibilities will necessitate the sharing of leadership recognition.

5. They are concerned that by delegating responsibility to someone else, they may be facilitating the advancement of that individual to the point at which the situation could become competitive (Heyel, 1960, pp. 126-135).

Like a major college football coach who refuses to allow an 18 year old quarterback to call the plays in a hotly contested game, the new principal does not want to run the risk of having a subordinate get him or her in serious trouble--or worst--fired. They believe that if things are going to get screwed up, they want to be the one responsible, and not some one else.

Some other researchers have noted that the nature of the principalship itself proves to be detrimental to many beginning principals. Because the job is essentially never completed, is extremely broad in scope, and is open-ended, it presents several dilemmas for new principals.

A principal must begin planning for next year while this year is in progress. At the same time, last year's results must be assessed.

Consequently, unlike the teacher's, the principal's work does not necessarily follow the calendar and ebb and flow of the school year. He or she does not wrap up work at the end of the school year. In fact, the pace of planning picks up for the ensuing year.

Because the job is so broad in scope, principals have considerable freedom to expend time performing those duties they wish to perform. As a result, they can avoid or at least not emphasize those activities that have no observable payoff and activities that they dislike performing. Some principals prefer the activities labeled "law enforcement" or "pastoral" (Morris and Crowson et al., 1984). They devote much time and effort to

student discipline, student counseling, and straightening out delinquents. They become secular soul savers.

Other principals prefer to raise funds, procure supplies and equipment, and develop extra-curriculum activities such as band and athletics. A third type of principal prefers the quasi-political aspects of the job. They prefer to work with PTA groups and spend time off campus with community leaders and local politicians for the high visibility it gives their schools and themselves. They can frequently be seen at school and community events either shaking hands and kissing babies - or shaking babies and kissing hands.

While every principal has duties that he or she prefers, the typical principal concentrates on these activities that are most personally fulfilling. For this reason, the principal's own values, competencies, and preferences will color the job, will determine priorities, and how he or she spends their valuable time. A final issue that new principals are concerned with is the reward system that prevails in the school district. Astute principals quickly learn the organizational culture, norms, values, and how they relate to the reward systems. Alert principals soon become aware of the opportunities for reward and advancement, and they learn how to exploit the formal and informal rules to enhance their own or their school's fortunes. Many school districts are perceived to have unwritten but widely recognized expectations of "how you really get ahead." Advancement often means a transfer to a larger or more

prestigious school, or a specialty school. Or, it may mean a transfer to an administrative position at the school district headquarters. Principals who do not learn the rules for getting ahead often find themselves staying where they are or being placed in a "dead end" administrative position with little authority or responsibility. In rare cases, failing to learn the rules for getting ahead can mean being sent back to the classroom.

Having established a context for beginning principals, what are some suggestions as to how they may transition smoothly into the role and become effective managers and leaders?

Recommendations for Success in the Principalship

(1) University preparation programs must prepare individuals to successfully assume the role.

Scott Thomson (1988), former executive director of the National Association of Secondary Principals, contends that a successful principalship stands on a professional knowledge base supported by three legs: management, leadership, and knowledge of schooling.

He says that if you cut off one leg, the school becomes unstable.

Thomson notes that traditional preparation program have tended to shortchange the leadership and management components, while emphasizing knowledge of schooling. The preparation model he outlines would include the following elements under **leadership**:

o Short and Long Term Planning

o Leadership: Research and Practice

o Communications: Internal and External

o Problem Analysis and Decision-making

Management would include:

o Human Resource Management

o Data and Information Management

o Administration of Facilities and Services

Professional Education would include:

o School Law

o Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction

o Program Design and Evaluation

o Pupil Personnel

Electives - Would be Based on Analysis of the Assessment Center Profile

(2) <u>School districts must be willing to provide new principal a comprehensive program of principal orientation.</u>

Since it is impossible for pre-service programs to provide principals everything that they should know before assuming the position, school districts must assume responsibility for orientating principals if they are to be successful in

the role. Personnel responsible for the following functions should each provide new principals with specific procedural details for their areas: instruction and curriculum, personnel, business management, public relations/school-community relations, student services, and transportation. Although the central office administration should be responsible for the orientation of new principals, experienced principals are probably the most valuable resource.

3. Provide New Principals Regular Feedback

Since isolation is a major problems for new principals, monthly sessions of about two hours should be arranged so that new principals might share their problems, challenges, and frustrations with each other and with carefully selected mentors. Mentors should be carefully selected and trained, however, for they may squelch fresh innovations and new ideas that beginning principals may bring to their positions. Mentors who are likely to try to persuade new principals to behave exactly as they do should not be used.

In small school districts where there are only one or two new principals, educational service units of two or more school districts might joint to form cooperative programs for the orientation of new principals. Meeting periodically with other new principals can do much to reduce the

isolation the new principals typically experience, and it can facilitate the formation of a support network.

4. Provide New Principals Formative Feedback

The new principal's immediate supervisor or mentor should ask questions about programs, the implementation of plans, about the need for mid-stream changes, about developing, maintaining, and dropping objectives, about finding new resources, and about the effect of school programs and plans on students in general and student learning in particular. Regular feedback, advice, and suggestions can be invaluable to new principals as they become familiar with the array of duties that must be performed and the many routine problems that occur in schools.

5. Require a Professional Growth Plan

Since new principals will seldom, if ever, be equipped with the repertoire of competencies, knowledge, and skills needed to effectively perform all of the required duties and responsibilities of the position, in concert with his or her mentor or supervisor, the new principal should develop and keep current a plan for future professional growth. At a minimum, the plan should include specific learning objectives, activities to be carried out, an implementation time line, and an evaluation plan.

This professional growth plan should include participating in local, state, and national professional administrator organizations, as these organizations provide many

opportunities for continued professional growth and development. State and national meetings of administrator associations, such as this one, provide many opportunities for new and experienced principals to learn about a wide range of professional topics. Also, meeting and visiting with administrators from other school districts while attending these conferences can do much to broaden one's perspective. Moreover, there is much to learn from convention hall exhibits about new learning materials and technology.

Summary

In summary, researchers and practitioners both now agree that the principal is probably the most important force for improving school effectiveness. The old adage, "as goes the principal, so goes the school," is now commonly accepted. Strong instructional leadership by the principal is a recognized correlate for an effective school. Though we certainly can do a better job in preparing and selecting principals, these activities are insufficient to guarantee success in the position. Qualified and competent beginning principals can fail in the role if they are not provided the necessary induction and support to learn to succeed in this demanding position. Without adequate support, even the best new principals will find it hard to reach their full potential.

Therefore, training, selecting, and supporting the men and women who will lead the schools of American into the 21st century is too important a task to be left to chance or happenstance.

I strongly urge each of you who is in a position to do so to leave here committed to taking some new principal under your wing and helping him or her to get through the isolation, frustrations, and problems he or she is undoubtedly confronting.

References

Blumberg, Arthur and Greenfield, William. (1980) The effective principal: perspectives on school leadership. (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Daresh, John C. (1986) Support for beginning principals: First hurdles are highest. Theory into practice. 2: pp. 168-173.

Duke, Daniel L. (1988) Why principals consider quitting. Kappan 70: (4) pp. 308-312.

Gorton, Richard A. and Schneider, Gail T. (1991) School-based leadership: challenges and opportunities. (3rd ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Publishers.

Heyel, Carl. (1960) Organizing your job in management. New York: American Management Association.

McPherson, R. Bruce, Crowson, Robert L. and Pitner, Nancy J. (1986) Managing uncertainty: administrative theory and practice in education. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

Morris, Van Cleve, Crowson, Robert L., Porter-Gehrie, Cynthia, and Hurwitz, Jr., Emanuel. (1984) Principals in action: the reality of managing schools. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company.

Thomas, Scott D. (1988) The principalship: ingredients of programs to prepare effective leaders. NASSP Bulletin, 72 (508), pp. 39-44.